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THE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY,

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

SAINT ANNE'S, DUBLIN,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 1782.

By THOMAS LELAND, D.D.

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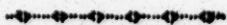
THE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY.



PSALM CXXII.

For my Brethren and Companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee.

*Because of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek
thy good.*



THIS Psalm is said to have been sung by the Tribes, as they went up in solemn procession to the Temple of Jerusalem. It expresses a lively sense of the blessings derived from their social union ; and (in the text particularly) a generous and rational affection for the welfare of their country.

We are told by the enemies of our holy Faith, that such affection, if not discouraged, is at least not inculcated by the Gospel. They have been confuted; but the charge hath been repeated. It hath even been asserted, that the genius of our Religion is utterly unfriendly to the interests of every worldly society; as if we had so learned Christ, as to stand detached from all those concerns and connexions, in which we are expressly bound to approve ourselves to God; and as if the law of universal love, were a law of useless, unfeeling, and unnatural indifference to all mankind.

True it is, that the Gospel-precepts are generally addressed to individuals, and tend generally to regulate the temper and conduct of individuals. But they suppose them already members of civil society: they are precepts by which the peace and welfare of society are most effectually promoted: they earnestly and repeatedly inculcate the duties arising from our
several

several social relations. The solicitude of our blessed Lord, for his country, and his brethren according to the flesh, we find * breaking forth in the tenderest effusions of affection and compassion. And such was the patriotic zeal (as we may call it) of Saint Paul, that † his very force and ardour of expression have given occasion to misinterpret and mistake him.

There is indeed a love of our country, falsely so called, which every Christian must disclaim, as utterly repugnant to the spirit of the Gospel. When it lends a fair disguise to insatiable and merciless ambition, when it drives men headlong into the ways of iniquity and cruelty, despoils, oppresses, harasses, and pursues what is called national glory through torrents of innocent blood; in these and many like cases, in every case indeed, where a partial affection for our native land, becomes inconsistent with the justice and benevolence due to mankind, it is no longer that
Christian

* Matth. xxiii. 37. Luke xix. 41.

† Rom. ix. 3.

Christian affection due to our people and our nation, but a sinful conspiracy against the rights and happiness of others.

But to distinguish the true love of our country from the spurious pretences of pride, avarice and ambition, we need but attend to the expressions of the text. They teach us not only the ground and foundation of this amiable virtue, but the proper fruits by which it should be manifested. Such is the subject, on which I now purpose to enlarge. At this time, and in this country, it is a subject seasonable and proper to be reviewed.

In the first place then, we are to hold our country dear, “for our brethren and companions’ sake.” By our social union it is, that we are enabled to form all those dear ties and connexions which constitute the happiness we now enjoy. Parents, children, brethren, friends, associates, fellow-citizens, are all enabled to live and act together, in affection and unity, in
peace,

peace, and mutual confidence, and general security. Their inheritances and acquisitions, the fruits of their industry, the reward of their labours, are quietly enjoyed, and freely applied to every purpose of benevolence and duty. They fear no savage violence; they recur to no savage violence for defence or for redress. For in their country, (as the Psalmist speaks) "is the seat of judgment;" the wholesome administration of those laws, which Providence hath appointed for their refuge. Thus are they enabled to provide nurture for their little ones, protection for their help-mates, to cultivate every honest art, and every liberal refinement of a civil state, to extend their amicable intercourse, and to enjoy all the advantages arising from a mutual exchange of good and friendly offices.

Such observations are not addressed to the sordid and selfish member of society. In vain do we tell him of the blessings enjoyed by his brethren and companions;
or

or of the grateful returns due to that society, by which these blessings are secured. He hath no brethren or companions; no affections strong enough to pierce beyond the narrow limits of his own interest. In some situations he may find it convenient to dissemble. He may insidiously assume the appearance of public spirit. He may brawl loudly, and contend violently for what he calls the public interest. In his fair and plausible disguise, he may wind his way patiently through the crooked paths of craft and dissimulation. But let him ask his own conscience, and it will assure him, that the end of all his labour is the gratification of his own rapacity, or pride, or whatever passion is predominant in his contracted mind. It is the honest, the ingenuous and liberal spirit which is susceptible of true public affection. It is he whose heart is full-fraught with Christian charity, that charity which extends to all around him, who knows and feels the value of those social advantages enjoyed by all around him.

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And here it is to be observed, that the reverence and affection for our community must be encreased and enlivened, in proportion to the wisdom and goodness of its institutions, and the provisions made for more effectually answering the purposes of our civil union.

Where men are subject to the most arbitrary dominion, still the habitual recollection of those scenes, in which, from their early years, they have found pleasure and enjoyment, may give them an instinctive love of their native land. Where civil government is tolerable, where it secures many essential advantages, though not all, that a free and liberal constitution can bestow, the affection for our society becomes a rational principle founded on a grateful sense of real benefits received, and the hopes of extending and improving them. But when in any state, God hath suddenly wrought a wonderful thing; when He in whose hand are the hearts both of Prince and

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People,

People, hath turned them to the purposes of his gracious mercy ; when, as at this time, and in this land, the rights of a people have been illustriously asserted, generously acknowledged, liberally restored ; when God hath not taken away from our Jerusalem, † “ the mighty man, the honourable, the counsellor, and the eloquent orator,” but hath called forth their zeal and abilities, to be the instruments of his providential goodness, to establish the work of our hands, and to transmit the blessing of our days, even to the latest generation of our children’s children ;—then, must the heart be hideously insensible, that doth not expand, and overflow with public affection, that doth not in the full triumph of benevolence, embrace and congratulate his brethren and companions, rejoice in their joy, and delight in their prosperity.

And,

† Isaiah iii. 2, 3.

And, blessed be God! we have manifested on this glorious occasion, that our patriotic affection is not confined to one district, or the precincts of one island. The whole extent of a mighty empire is our country; and the members of its remotest borders, our brethren and fellow-citizens; with one civil constitution, and one interest, and one gracious Sovereign, and I trust, with one heart of loyalty and grateful reverence to the common father of an united people.

But to return to the general doctrine of the text. The affection due to our community, is not merely for the temporal advantages derived from our social union, but, "because of the House of the Lord our God:" because we have the opportunity, in civil life, of being nurtured in the knowledge and fear of the Most High; of uniting with our christian brethren in every solemn act of adoration of the great Lord of heaven and earth; of worshipping, serving, and obeying; of

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habituate

habituating ourselves and others to every religious duty ; of profiting by every pious example, and letting our own light so shine, that men may see our good works, edify by our piety, and catch the flame of our devotion. Would to God ! that they who with such exquisite sensibility watch over our civil rights, were in every instance, equally impressed with the importance of our religious interests. Alas ! it is not by refined reasoning that men are seduced into a shameful indifference to the duties of a Christian life, the real happiness and honour of every individual, and the exaltation of every community. They call it philosophy ; but they call it not aright. It is vain deceit. It is ignorance tricked out in the gaudy colouring of affected speculation, whispering peace, where there is no peace, and pandering to vice and vanity. But you, my brethren, who have not forsaken the assembling yourselves before God, who have at this moment, taken your part in the solemnity of public adoration,

ration, cannot be insensible to the religious blessings you enjoy, or forgetful of the reverence and affection due to the community, in which the House of the Lord is established and supported.

Nor is there an individual of our nation, who names the name of Christ, that must not feel the force of this affecting motive, whatever be his principles, or mode of worship. For consider, I beseech you, that at this day we enjoy a full measure of religious liberty. While our Governors are free to chuse that mode of Christian doctrine and discipline, to which they are to give a public support, every member of our society is also free to pursue any other mode his conscience shall direct; serving God in the way that he approves, without reproach or molestation: and all joining, as I trust we do, as faithful and affectionate fellow-citizens, without envying or unreasonable prejudice, without jealousy, censure, or uncharitableness, in mutual forbearance and indulgence,

gence, in the spirit of charity and loving-kindness, as servants of the same Master, and children of the same Family, whose head and father is Christ Jesus. Alas! this was not the state of our fore-fathers. Oppression and persecution disgraced their dreary periods; and every sect and every faction, in their turn, experienced and inflicted the severity of a rancorous intolerance. But let us cast a shade over the errors of old time. If we be indeed converted, it is our part "to strengthen our brethren,"* to profit by our present opportunities, to cultivate the blessings of peace and benevolence, and with a godly solicitude for the spiritual as well as temporal interests of society, to cherish and propagate the principles of true religion, as our stations and abilities may admit. For this is "the stay and the staff," † the refuge and comfort of every individual, and the strength and sure support of every society.

And

* Luke xxii. 32.

† Isaiah iii. 1.

And having thus considered the grounds and reasons of the affection due to that community, by which we are protected in our dearest rights; we are in the next place to enquire how this affection is to be expressed, and what fruits it should produce. And here also, we have the royal Prophet for our direction. "I will say, Peace be within thee," or according to the translation of our public service, "I will wish thee prosperity." And, "I will seek thy good:" or, "I will seek to do thee good." To an affectionate regard, then, for the welfare of our society, we are to add our upright and zealous endeavours to promote its welfare, according to the circumstances and situation, in which God's good Providence hath placed us.

Were I now to address myself to the great ones of this world, to those whom God hath raised up, to be immediate guardians of the public welfare, I should, by God's grace, boldly enforce the sacred
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and momentous duties to which they are appointed; the zeal and diligence they should exert, the comforts and advantages which society justly claims from them, as national counsellors, ministers, law-givers, men of ample property, exalted station, distinguished abilities, or extensive influence. I should labour to recall their attention to that unerring wisdom which trieth the heart, and that tremendous justice which shall call every servant to a strict account of the things committed to his charge.

But, blessed be God, we have all, in our several orders and degrees, the opportunities and power of doing good to society. Nor can it be denied, that a sincere and ardent zeal for the public welfare hath been frequently and honourably displayed, in what the pride of man calls the inferior orders of life. We have the same affections with our superiors, and naturally the same judgment to discern the real interests of a country, so far at least

least as we have power to pursue them. We have the same motives to endear us to society. And such is the unsuspecting ardour of our public spirit, that those above us may have sometimes found it an useful instrument of their sinister purposes, and betrayed us into faction, while they affected to lead us forward in a public cause. We may be deceived, but our principle is upright and honourable. And how effectually it hath operated for the advancement of the public welfare, let those bear witness who have observed the progress of events in this country, even for a few years. We may be accused of turbulence and faction, and rash meddling in things too high for us. But that in our most vigorous exertions for the public, we have been temperate, and moderate, and peaceable, as well as firm, and determined, and persevering, the present glorious aspect of our public affairs, is an ample and an honourable proof.

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And

And for the comfort of the humblest and lowliest among us, let it be considered, that there is not any order, or any station, or any worldly condition, that hath not its opportunities to seek the good of our Jerusalem. He who raises up a family, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"* is the friend and benefactor of the public. He who labours diligently, soberly and peaceably in his honest calling. who reclaims the barren waste, who promotes the useful manufacture, who gives reward to the ingenious, and food to the industrious, he, I say, is the friend and benefactor of the public: and he who in any state, conscientiously discharges the duties of his Christian calling, and acts in faithful conformity to the precepts of the Gospel, is at the same time the useful and the valuable citizen. For these two characters are intimately connected: and "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."†

Not

* Eph. vi. 4.

† Matth. xix. 6.

Nor can I dismiss the present subject, without earnest and repeated exhortation. The situation of our country calls us to serious reflection. And let every individual among us attentively consider what is his proper conduct, in a period like the present, as a citizen, and as a subject. I shall enforce it by the authority of Saint Peter.* And he hath summed it up in such expression, as should sink deep into the hearts of us all, high and low, eminent or obscure, in public or in private life.

HONOUR ALL MEN, saith the Apostle.

And respect and honour may be due to those who even differ from us in political sentiments, or do not hold the interests of our nation so dear, as we ourselves. Let us, at least, not disgrace our cause or character, by rudeness and reviling. Beware of rash suspicions: be guarded against groundless suggestions:

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disdain

* 1 Pet. ii. 17.

disdain reproach or calumny. Judge not those who may pursue the same end, with others, but not, perhaps, approve of the same means or mode of procedure. Honour all, whose abilities have been zealously and successfully exerted in our service, all who have assisted, concurred, favoured, and supported: for these are all worthy of double honour.

At the same time—**LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD.**

And let no accidental distinctions abate that love, which is at once our bounden duty, and our real interest. That false and disingenuous policy which cast us all at a contemptuous distance from our fellow-subjects, and rent us from each other, is, I trust, no more. Let then our bands of social union be closed and strengthened: that at length we may be one people, and one undivided nation: remembering always, that the calamities of this land have ever issued from one bitter source,

source, the disunion of its inhabitants,
and estrangement of their affections.

And, FEAR GOD.

For the fear of God is the firm base, on which alone the happiness of every man, and the prosperity of every nation, rest securely and immoveably. It is the blessed root, from which every branch of duty, springs in full vigour, is fed and enlivened, for refreshment, for comfort and protection: while, "every plant which our heavenly father hath not planted, shall be rooted up;" * and every principle substituted in the place of his holy law, shall prove their futility and presumption, who "speak swelling words of vanity, beguiling unstable souls." †

And lastly, we are to HONOUR THE KING.

"So is the will of God," ‡ in all cases, and in every government. But here, I
trust,

* Matth. xv. 13. † 2 Pet. ii. 8. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 15.

trust, there is little need to enforce the precept, when every heart exults, and every tongue proclaims the grateful love and reverence due to our gracious Sovereign: when one wish, and one prayer echoes through the land, that God will give the King his judgments, and his righteousness unto the King's son: * that he may judge his people with righteousness, save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor: that his counsels may be directed by the spirit of wisdom; his arm strengthened in the might of the Lord; his enemies turned back; and that in his days, and the days of his latest posterity, the righteous may flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.

Such should be our dispositions, sentiments, and affections: and, "whatsoever we do," as fellow-christians, fellow-citizens, and fellow-subjects, "let us do it heartily, as unto the Lord," from christian

* Psal. lxxii. 1.

tian principles, and christian motives, in the spirit of our religion, and to the glory of God's holy name. That so, when all earthly communities shall be dissolved, and every worldly distinction of men lost in the glorious kingdom of the Lamb, we may be numbered with the ten-thousand times ten-thousand that surround the throne of God ; and with the innumerable Hosts of glorious creatures, fall before the throne, in never-ceasing praise and adoration, saying, " Blessing and honour, and glory and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever !" *

Amen ! O gracious Lord God, may thy holy name be ever praised and blessed, in all the Churches of the Saints on earth, and through all the regions of glory and immortality !

* Rev. v. 13.

THE END.

